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ABSTRACT

Empirical studies of Japanese work ethics have tended to focus on male workers while neglecting women. In addition, work values in both Japan and the United States appear to be changing. More information is needed on the work values of American and Japanese female workers. A study was conducted to explore the work ethics of Japanese women and to compare them to those of American women. Subjects were 261 Japanese and 347 American employed women who were tourists in Hawaii. Subjects completed the Work Ethics questionnaire, an instrument designed to reflect the traditional values of both Japanese and American cultures. The questionnaire was translated into Japanese for Japanese subjects. T-tests used to test for significance of differences revealed that the Japanese and American women differed significantly on 27 of 37 work ethics. In comparison with American women, Japanese women were more prone to value group participation; to work in large rather than small companies; to value loyalty to employer and country; to desire more time for leisure and recreational activiites; and to believe that suffering adds meaning to life and that money acquired easily is usually spend unwisely. American women were more prone to value individualism, independence, self-expression and personal growth; and to believe that individual freedom is more important than group solidarity, that hard work pays off in success, that many people dislike work and try to avoid it, and that most people have too much leisure. (NB)

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The Work Values of Japanese Women*

John W. Engel**

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The Work Values of Japanese Women

Abstract

This study describes the work ethics of Japanese women and compares them with those of American women. A work ethic questionnaire was designed to reflect the traditional values of both Japanese and American cultures. It was translated into Japanese for purposes of comparison. Questionnaires were administered to over 600 employed women from Japan (N = 261) and America (N = 347). T-tests were used to test for significance of differences between groups.

In comparison with American women, Japanese women were more prone to value group participation, work in large rather than small companies, and loyalty to employer and country, to desire more time for leisure and recreational activities, and to believe that suffering adds meaning to life, and money acquired easily is usually spent unwisely. On the other hand, American women were more prone to value individualism, independence, self-expression and personal growth, and to believe that individual freedom is more important than group solidarity, that hard work pays off in success, that many people dislike work and try to avoid it, and that most people have too much leisure.

The Work Values of Japanese Women

In recent years, Japanese workers and corporations have performed technological and economic "miracles" (Condon, 1985; Morrow, 1983; Vogel, 1979) in the international marketplace. Once somewhat of a joke, "made in Japan" now means the highest of quality. As a result, there is a growing interest, if not fascination with Japanese work ethics and management styles (e.g., Kraft, 1983; Morishima, 1982; Ouchi, 1981; and Vogel, 1979), which are commonly assumed to be the foundation of Japan's success.

The literature on Japanese work ethics tends to assume that traditional values are still strong in modern Japan. But as in most other parts of the world, Japanese work values may be changing. Indeed, there are some concerns in Japan that their traditional values are being "lost" and that they might need protection from the "negative" influences of Western ideas (Yates, 1985). Thus research is needed that explores contemporary as well as traditional Japanese work ethics.

The literature on Japanese work ethics also tends to rely heavily on anecdote. The exceptional empirical study of Japanese work ethics tends to focus on male workers and managers while neglecting women (e.g., Engel, 1985; Maguire

& Kroliczak, 1983). However, at least one recent author (Condon, 1985) has suggested that the Japanese economic "miracle" has resulted from the values and work of Japanese women. Thus empirical research is needed that explores the work values of Japanese women.

In recent years America has experienced a decline in productivity and profits relative to competition in the international marketplace. Increasingly questions are raised about the health of the traditional ("Protestant") work ethic that was commonly believed to underlie America's earlier growth and development into a super power (e.g., Maccoby, 1981; Maccoby & Terzi, 1981). Research is needed that explores the work values of contemporary American workers and to determine whether they are indeed changing.

Traditional Japanese work ethics emphasize respect for elders and authority, filial peity, group harmony, service, duty, loyalty, education, hard work, frugality, self-sacrifice, and asceticism (Morishima, 1982). Therefore, one might expect Japanese women to hold such values more than American women.

On the other hand, traditional American ("Protestant" or "Puritan") work ethics emphasized individualism, independence, self-sufficiency, hard work, education, having the right attitude, frugality and asceticism. It warned against the dangers of leisure, immoderate consumption, and

pleasure. Thus one might expect American women to hold such values more than Japanese women.

The purpose of this research was to explore the work ethics of Japanese women and compare them to those of American women.

Method

The Work Ethics questionnaire was designed to assess work related values, beliefs and attitudes. Items were constructed to reflect traditional Japanese values and contemporary Japanese management practices. Items from the Protestant Ethic Scale (MacDonald, 1972; Mirels & Garrett, 1971) were included to reflect traditional American values. Items offered a Likert scale response format: strongly agree to strongly disagree. The questionnaire was translated into Japanese. The two language versions were tested for equivalency by expert judges, "back translated" (Brislin, 1980), and revised for purposes of comparison.

Questionnaires were distributed to over 1000 Japanese and American tourists visiting Hawaii. Subsamples of 261 Japanese and 347 American employed women were selected for purposes of analysis, in an attempt to control for extraneous variables. The mean age of Japanese women was 28, compared with 31 for American women. Education averaged

14 years for both groups. Thirty-eight percent of Japanese women reported being married, compared with 36 percent of American women. Japanese women reported living in households averaging 3.4 people, compared with households averaging 2.6 people for American women. While Japanese women reported an average workweek of 5.5 days, American women reported a 5 day average workweek. T-tests were used to test for significance of differences between Japanese and American groups on each work ethic item.

Results and Discussion

Japanese and American women were found to differ significantly ($p < .05$) on 27 of 37 work ethic items.

Group Orientation vs Individualism

The results of comparisons of Japanese and American values related to group (country, work, family) loyalty, cooperation, competition, individualism, independence, and size of work group are summarized in Table 1.

Insert Table 1 about here.

Japanese women, compared with American women, were expected to be more loyal to the group, whether the group be construed as country, employer/corporation, or family. The results indicate that while both groups appear relatively patriotic, it was more important to Japanese women than to American women that their work serve their country in some way (item 1).

While both Japanese and American groups tended to reject the idea that "a worker should be loyal and stay with the same employer until retirement" (item 2), and to be uncertain about whether "out of loyalty . . . (they) would reject a job offer from another company willing to pay a higher salary" (item 3), Japanese women tended to agree with both of these ideas more than did American women.

Both groups tended to reject ideas that "out of loyalty to employer, an employee should go to work early and stay late" (item 4) and "students should work for good grades out of respect and honor for their parents" (item 5). No significant differences were found between groups on these items.

Japanese women were expected to value group participation, cooperation and harmony more than American women. The results show that Japanese women believed more than did American women that "one should take an active part in all group affairs" (item 6). However, it was less

important to Japanese women, than to American women, that they "work with people who cooperate well with one another" (item 7). And, Japanese women tended to agree, more than American women, that "competition between individuals within the same company is good for all concerned" (item 8). Regarding the latter, it should be noted that large Japanese corporations generally encourage competition between work groups. Japanese respondents may have interpreted item 8 in terms of this kind of competition rather than the competition "between individuals" that is part of Western traditions.

Japanese women were expected to value individualism less than American women. The results show that, while both groups tended to be uncertain, Japanese women agreed less than did American women with the idea that "individual freedom is more important than group solidarity" (item 9). Similarly, while both groups indicated that it was important to them that their "work provide opportunities for self-expression and personal growth" (item 10), Japanese women tended to agree less than did American women with this idea.

On the other hand, while both groups tended to reject the idea that "an employee should sacrifice him/her self for the good of the company" (item 11), Japanese women tended to reject this idea more than did American women. This may be

an indication of change and rejection of a traditional value among Japanese working women.

Japanese women were expected to value independence and self sufficiency less than American women. However, the results appear inconsistent. While both groups tended to be uncertain about whether "only those who depend upon themselves get ahead in life" (item 12), Japanese women tended to reject this idea more than did American women. On the other hand, Japanese women tended to agree, more than did American women, that "to be superior, a man must stand alone" (item 13).

Japanese women were expected to value affiliation with larger work groups more than American women. Indeed, Japanese women did express less desire, than did American women, "to be (their own) boss" (item 14). And Japanese women tended to believe, more than American women, that "a large corporation is generally a more desirable place to work than a small company" (item 15).

The Value of Work, Education, Attitudes

Both Japanese and American traditions value work, education, and attitude or work spirit. The results of comparisons of Japanese and American values related to work, education, and work attitudes are summarized in Table 2.

Insert Table 2 about here.

Both Japanese and American groups tended to be uncertain about whether they "would want to do some kind of work even if (they) were not paid" (item 1). Nevertheless, Japanese women had less of a tendency to agree, than did American women, that "many employees have an inherent dislike for work and will avoid it if they can" (item 2).

While both groups agreed that "education leads to success and promotion in the world of work" (item 3), Japanese women did not agree as much as did American women. While this may at first be surprising to those familiar with the value attached to education by Confucian traditions (Kraft, 1983; Morishima, 1982), it is understandable when one considers the relatively high degree of discrimination against working women in Japan compared with America (Condon, 1985). America may still be "the land of opportunity," particularly for women.

The results suggest that both Japanese and American women place a high value on hard work. For example, both groups tended to agree that "any man who is able and willing to work hard has a good chance of succeeding" (item 4).

However Japanese women may not value hard work as much as do American women. Japanese women, compared with American women, were less likely to agree that "if one works hard enough he is likely to make a good life for himself" (item 5), and more likely to agree that "hard work offers little guarantee of success" (item 6). Japanese women also tended to agree less than did American women that "the most difficult school courses turn out to be the most rewarding" (item 7) and "there are few satisfactions equal to the realization that one has done his best" (item 8).

Beliefs regarding the value of hard work can also be expressed in terms of negative judgments applied to people who fail to work hard enough. Both Japanese and American groups tended to be uncertain about whether "most people who don't succeed in life are just plain lazy" (item 9), "people who fail at a job have usually not tried hard enough" (item 10), and "a distaste for hard work usually reflects a weakness of character" (item 11).

While no significant differences were found between groups on items 9 and 10, Japanese women tended to agree with item 11 ("reflects a weakness of character") more than did American women. While this latter finding may appear inconsistent with earlier findings, it could be that the item taps an additional factor, such as the Japanese tendency to use judgments and guilt to motivate and shape

behavior (Goldman, 1986).

Japanese women tended to agree less than American women with the idea that "the man who can approach an unpleasant task with enthusiasm is the man who gets ahead" (item 12). This difference, along with those found for items 5 and 6, may reflect the influence on American women of America's traditional optimism and "can do" work attitudes.

Asceticism, "Easy Money," Credit, and Leisure

The results of comparisons of Japanese and American values related to asceticism, "easy money," credit, and leisure are summarized in Table 3.

Insert Table 3 about here.

While neither group appears to be strongly ascetic in their work ethics, Japanese women may be more ascetic than American women. Japanese women, as well as American women, appear to be uncertain about whether they "would be more successful if (they) sacrificed certain pleasures" (item 1). Nevertheless, Japanese women tended to believe more than did American women that "life would have little meaning if we

never had to suffer" (item 2).

The results indicate that while both groups tend to be uncertain about whether "the self-made man is likely to be more ethical than the man born to wealth" (item 3), Japanese women tend to agree more than American women that "money acquired easily (e.g., via gambling or speculation) is usually spent unwisely" (item 4). Japanese women also agree more than American women that "the credit card is a ticket to careless spending" (item 5). Thus, there appears to be some evidence that thrift may be more highly valued by Japanese women than be American women.

Both Japanese and American groups tended to disagree with the idea that "society would have fewer problems if people had less leisure time" (item 6). However, compared with American women, Japanese women showed more of a tendency to reject the idea that "most people spend too much time in unprofitable amusements" (item 7), and to agree that "life would be more meaningful if we had more leisure time" (item 8) and that "people should have more leisure time to spend in relaxation" (item 9). Such differences could be attributed to tradition. Traditional American ("Puritan") work ethics considered leisure to be negative and harmful, such that American women could be expected to be less positive in their views and desires. On the other hand, it could be that Japanese women appear to value leisure more

than do American women because they have less leisure time than do American women. Japanese workers in general tend to have a longer work week than do American workers, and the samples compared herein are no exception. In this study, the Japanese women averaged 5.5 work days per week compared with 5 work days per week for the American women.

Whether or not they view leisure as good, or desire more leisure time for themselves, both groups indicated that they tend to "feel uneasy when there is little work . . . to do" (item 10).

Conclusion

Generalizations from this study should take into account various limitations in the data. Some questionnaire items from the Protestant Ethic Scale (Mirels & Garrett, 1971) may appear to be sexist. This study compromises the ideal of nonsexist language inorder to use a measure of traditional American work ethics that has been shown to be valid and reliable. Items that referred to "he" or "his" work may have reduced validity when applied to women's work. Though both cultures have traditions in which "work" was considered part of the masculine role, this may be more of a problem for American women than for Japanese women, because American women tend to be more "liberated" than Japanese

women. The data are also limited by sampling. There is no assurance that the women sampled in this study adequately represent all women, or even all middle class employed women in either Japan or America. Additional research is needed on larger samples wherein subjects are randomly selected from the whole population of Japanese and American women.

In summary, the results suggest that Japanese women, compared to American women, tend to place a higher value on loyalty to country, loyalty to employer or corporation, group participation, competition, group solidarity, work in a large company, asceticism, thrift, and leisure. Though contemporary Japanese working women may appear to be relatively traditional in comparison with American women, they still, nevertheless, reject many of the work ethics believed to be traditionally Japanese.

On the other hand, the results suggest that American women, compared with Japanese women, tend to place a higher value on individualism, independence, cooperation between coworkers, self-expression and personal growth, self-sacrifice, being self-employed, education, hard work, difficult tasks, doing one's best, and enthusiasm or optimism; and tend more to believe that people dislike and avoid work, and spend too much time in leisure. It appears that American women workers still retain some of their traditional ("Protestant") work ethics.

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Table I. Group vs Individualism: A Comparison of Japanese and American Values

Group Orientation vs Individualism	Japanese (n = 261) Mean	American (n = 347) Mean	t
1. It is important to me that my work serves my country, indirectly if not directly.	3.85	3.44	-5.88***
2. A worker should be loyal and stay with the same employer until retirement.	2.34	1.86	-6.83***
3. Out of loyalty to my employer, I would reject a job offer from another company willing to pay a higher salary.	3.00	2.50	-5.46***
4. Out of loyalty to employer, an employee should go to work early and stay late.	1.99	2.06	1.07
5. Students should work for good grades out of respect and honor for their parents.	2.36	2.46	1.24
6. One should take an active part in all group affairs.	3.27	3.07	-2.89**
7. It is very important to me that I work with people who cooperate well with one another.	4.23	4.48	4.38***
8. Competition between individuals within the same company is good for all concerned.	3.40	3.08	-4.46***
9. Individual freedom is more important than group solidarity.	2.75	3.41	8.50***
10. It is very important to me that my work provide opportunities for self-expression and personal growth.	4.30	4.45	2.65**
11. An employee should sacrifice him/her self for the good of the company.	2.01	2.54	6.74***
12. Only those who depend upon themselves get ahead in life.	2.86	3.26	4.59***
13. To be superior, a man must stand alone.	3.81	2.33	-19.48***
14. I would like to be my own boss.	3.20	3.81	8.16***
15. A large corporation is generally a more desirable place to work than a small company.	2.99	2.45	-6.96***

Note: Means were calculated from Likert scale scores, i.e., 1 = strongly disagree, 2 = disagree, 3 = uncertain, 4 = agree, and 5 = strongly agree.
*p < .05, **p < .01, ***p < .001.

Table 2. Work and Education: A Comparison of Japanese and American Values

Values of Work, Education, Attitude	Japanese (n = 261) Mean	American (n = 347) Mean	t
1. I would want to do some kind of work even if I were not paid.	3.46	3.47	0.11
2. Many employees have an inherent dislike for work, and will avoid it if they can.	2.74	3.13	4.21***
3. Education leads to success and promotion in the world of work.	3.72	4.01	3.63***
4. Any man who is able and willing to work hard has a good chance of succeeding.	4.05	4.14	1.39
5. If one works hard enough he is likely to make a good life for himself.	3.51	3.99	7.74***
6. Hard work offers little guarantee of success.	3.10	2.44	-8.95***
7. The most difficult school courses turn out to be the most rewarding.	2.67	3.26	7.34***
8. There are few satisfactions equal to the realization that one has done his best.	3.76	3.92	2.17*
9. Most people who don't succeed in life are just plain lazy.	2.59	2.75	1.77
10. People who fail at a job have usually not tried hard enough.	3.00	3.01	0.14
11. A distaste for hard work usually reflects a weakness of character.	3.42	3.05	-4.65***
12. The man who can approach an unpleasant task with enthusiasm is the man who gets ahead.	3.24	3.77	7.86***

Note: Means were calculated from Likert scale scores, i.e., 1 = strongly disagree, 2 = disagree, 3 = uncertain, 4 = agree, and 5 = strongly agree.
*p < .05, **p < .01, ***p < .001.

Table 3. Asceticism and Leisure: A Comparison of Japanese and American Values

Asceticism, Thrift, Credit, Leisure	Japanese (n = 261) Mean	American (n = 347) Mean	t
1. I would be more successful if I sacrificed certain pleasures.	2.80	2.79	-0.22
2. Life would have very little meaning if we never had to suffer.	4.03	3.54	-7.09***
3. The self-made man is likely to be more ethical than the man born to wealth.	3.14	3.18	0.53
4. Money acquired easily (e.g., via gambling or speculation) is usually spent unwisely.	3.82	3.38	-5.42***
5. The credit card is a ticket to careless spending.	3.62	3.09	-5.97***
6. Society would have fewer problems if people had less leisure time.	2.38	2.34	-0.44
7. Most people spend too much time in unprofitable amusements.	2.65	2.97	4.15***
8. Life would be more meaningful if we had more leisure time.	3.56	2.90	-9.56***
9. People should have more leisure time to spend in relaxation.	4.19	3.41	-11.61***
10. I feel uneasy when there is little work for me to do.	3.81	3.70	-1.57

Note: Means were calculated from Likert scale scores, i.e., 1 = strongly disagree, 2 = disagree, 3 = uncertain, 4 = agree, and 5 = strongly agree.
*p < .05, **p < .01, ***p < .001.